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Smooth French rock royalty float in style

Johnny and Sylvie: A special species.

Johnny Hallyday and Sylvie Vartan are, without a doubt, the king and queen of rock 'n' roll in France.

They've been together for a decade, from "yé yé" to "le rock". Their trials and tribulations (stormy break-ups ands touching reconcilliations) still make news in France-Soir and Salue les Copains Their discs, most of them lamentable Parisian imitations of American pop music vogues, remain an indelible part of the European hit parade.

Hallyday and Vartan are together in Quebec for the first time, for a "super-show" at Place des Nations tonight.

They floated into a downtown disco club earlier this week to meet the Quebecois media, bringing with them deep suntans and hair that is blonder than ever. They sat on velvet cushions — Johnny in a three piece creme suit, Sylvie wearing knee-high boots — quietly hiding behind their sunglasses as the photographers flashed their bulbs.

Here they are more of a curiosity than anything else (just as Robert Charlebois is considered in France as a wildman from the frontiere). They are sleek, smooth, "le style".

THEIR STYLE

That their music is so unsophisticated (and rank in the way only French fonctionnaires can make pop) seems besides the point. It's their style, the blonde pout and the clothes, that keeps them on top.

Hallyday burst upon the scenes in 1960, at the age of 16. He had spent much of his childhood travelling about the cabarets and music halls of Europe with his cousins; the first song he sang, at 11, was The Ballad of Davy Crockett.

A few years later, he was France's answer to Presley. Riots followed him everywhere, he was banned in Strasbourg and Cannes.

Rock & Pop

by Juan Rodriguez

Of his rock 'n' roll music, one critic said Hallyday would land up in a madhouse if he kept it up. Since then he's played the Olympia and Palais du Sport in Paris countless times and sold over 35 million records.

Vartan was the mini-skirted star of French pop during the Beatlemania days. There was once a time when it seemed the only three women in the glossy fan and fashion magazines were Sylvie, Francoise Hardy and Jean Shrimpton: they all had "le look".

PUBLIC EYE

Today, Johnny and Sylvie do not look as if they worry about the past. In fact, they appear almost younger, the baby fat has gone.

They are used to living their lives in the public eye, and one wonders what they'd feel if nobody looked at them. They strolled through Place Bonaventure, wearing sunglasses and the eternal blase expression, while a photographer clicked away a centre spread for a Montreal morning tabloid. They dutifully waded through radio interviews. They walk and talk as if they are the only citizens of their own private country.

They appear almost sullen as they manage one-sentence answers to their interviewers. Has Johnny listened to the Quebecois rock sound? He likes Charlebois ("formidable") but hadn't heard anything else. Sylvie said she liked Beau Dommage. Why "Because they're very original".

They don't understand "joual" but sait it's very nice that the Quebecois have their own way of speaking.

Johnny said that nobody has the true rock 'n' roll feeling anymore, except perhaps himself. He said he saves all his energy for the time he steps on stage. He said he is looking forward to travelling across the American southwest by motorcycle, "like in Easy Rider".

And what about their show tonight? Johnny and Sylvie have promised some changes. They've come accompanied by a troupe of 20 musicians, singers and dancers. They plan to make the music a little more complex, but not overly so.

It's more important that they keep on keepin' on being Johnny Hallyday and Sylvie Vartan. They are a species unto themselves.

New Canadian play receives hostile reception at Stratford

By JAMIE PORTMAN
Southam News Services

STRATFORD — It was inevitable that Michael Tait's new play, Fellowship, would raise hackles.

It deals with religion, sex, loving, dying and madness. It features the terrible wasteful death of a child as well as the on-stage crucifixion of a maddened priest.

Nevertheless, it's difficult to comprehend the hostility with which Fellowship has been greeted. It had the roughest press reception of any Stratford offering this year. It has enraged playgoers. Its recent run at Stratford's experimental Third Stage suffered from poor box-office. From the beginning it had the aura of failure.

And, of course, it has raised questions in certain quarters about artistic director Robin Phillips' judgment in allowing a play like Fellowship into a Stratford season.

The latter criticism has disturbing implications because of the probability that it will be eagerly seized upon by Canada's rabid theatrical nationalists who are continuing to bay for the British-born Phillips' hide.

It would be difficult indeed for this faction to concede that Phillips is doing anything right as far as promotion of Canadian drama is concerned. The Fellowship debacle will simply fuel their contention that Phillips' presence at Stratford is a hindrance rather than an asset.

Such a contention, naturally, is balderdash. On the basis of this first Stratford season, Phillips has demonstrated that he will be very good for Canadian theatre. Furthermore, one can unreservedly state that he was absolutely right in his decision to put Fellowship into the current season.

Robin Phillips finds his judgment questioned.

MIRACLE

Tait's flawed but fascinating drama takes place in an old house in central Toronto where a community of believers awauts the Second Coming. They are breakaways from the Anglican church, their leader a priest who pursues an increasingly demented vision. Eventually, he and the community disintegrate as a result of pressures from within and without.

Fellowship has upset people because Tait declines to compromise or play safe.

Churchgoers find it disconcerting because it examines the appalling byways religion can take as a result of today's social stresses.

But Fellowship is by no means a demolition job on religious faith — which is why it can be equally distressing to the alleged non-believer. The play does operate from a firm spiritual premise — a premise which is prepared to affirm the validity of religious faith and practice in a fundamentally pagan era, and which makes clear the fact that it is examining the nature of spiritual anguish rather than a more easily explanable psychological anguish.

A child lies dying in an upstairs room because the people seek a healing miracle. The miracle does not come. The child dies. Medical science could have helped it. Could medicine, science or psychiatry help the community members responsible for this tragedy? The play's answer would seem to be no.

It's as unfashionable in this day and age to offer glimpses of hell as it is to offer glimpses of heaven. Yet Tait ploughs head with his uncompromising metaphysical preoccupations, punctuating proceedings with references to such uncomfortable provocative subjects as "the absence of God." It is easier to treat Fellowship with derision than it is turn one's back on it.

The script is too lurching and episodic. Some characters are incomplete. But Tait writes good naturalistic dialogue and invests his play with a rough but ready compassion.

Bernards Hopkins did create an atmosphere

Bernard Hopkins' production revealed a gallant but futile attempt to give the play the narrative fuidity so lackin in the script. But Hopkins did create an atmosphere of spiritual malaise, and despite an uneven cast, he did extract some performances of note — most significantly from Neil Vipond as the termented priest, Lynne Griffin as a troubled teen-ager and Robert Benson as her father.

A failure? In a sense, yes — but a failure with honor. Besides, Stratford's Third Stage is anexperimental stage, and part of its mandate is the freedom to take risks.

Young Montrealers star in CTV's Kidstuff

TORONTO — (CP) — Four talented Montreal 11-year-olds are the stars of a new CTV Television Network show designed for the Saturday forenoon children's audience.

Kidstuff is aimed at children aged 8 to 12 and hopes primarily to entertain them while, secondarily, giving them a television form of educational enrichment.

The series is being supervised by Janis Nostbakken, who was education supervisor for the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (OECA) for four years, and will this year also be educational adviser for CTV's long-running children's show, Romper Room.

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